DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 129 507 RC 009 461

TITLE	A Recommended Process for the Implementation of CHOICE (Communities Have Options in Control of Education).
INSTITUTION	Bureau of Indian Affairs (Dept. of Interior), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	74
NOTE	11p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Agency Role; *American Indians; *Community Involvement; Decision Making; *Educational Assessment; Educational Needs; *Individual Power; Program Design; *Program Development; Program Guides; Program Planning; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	BIA; Bureau of Indian Affairs; CHOICE; *Communities Have Options in Control of Education

ABSTRACT

American Indian people, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the nation all have a common interest in assuring a quality education for Indian children. No education program can be truly effective, however, unless it has the support and the involvement of those directly benefiting from it--the Indian students, parents, and communities. Therefore, the BIA developed the Communities Have Options in Control of Education (CHOICE) Program to insure that educational self-determination becomes a fact for Indian people. With this in mind, the BIA has attempted to develop a useful implementation process to assist Indian people in making informed choices concerning educational programs and goals. This booklet describes each element in the implementation process--presentation, development and expression of community readiness; identification of goals, objectives, and needs; translation of needs into educational possibilities; program planning and revision; program design and development; evaluation; and the status report. Each description answers four questions: who it is that performs the functions of each element; what it is that can be accomplished in each element; when each element should occur in the annual cycle; and why it is desirable that each element occur in the process. (Author/NQ)

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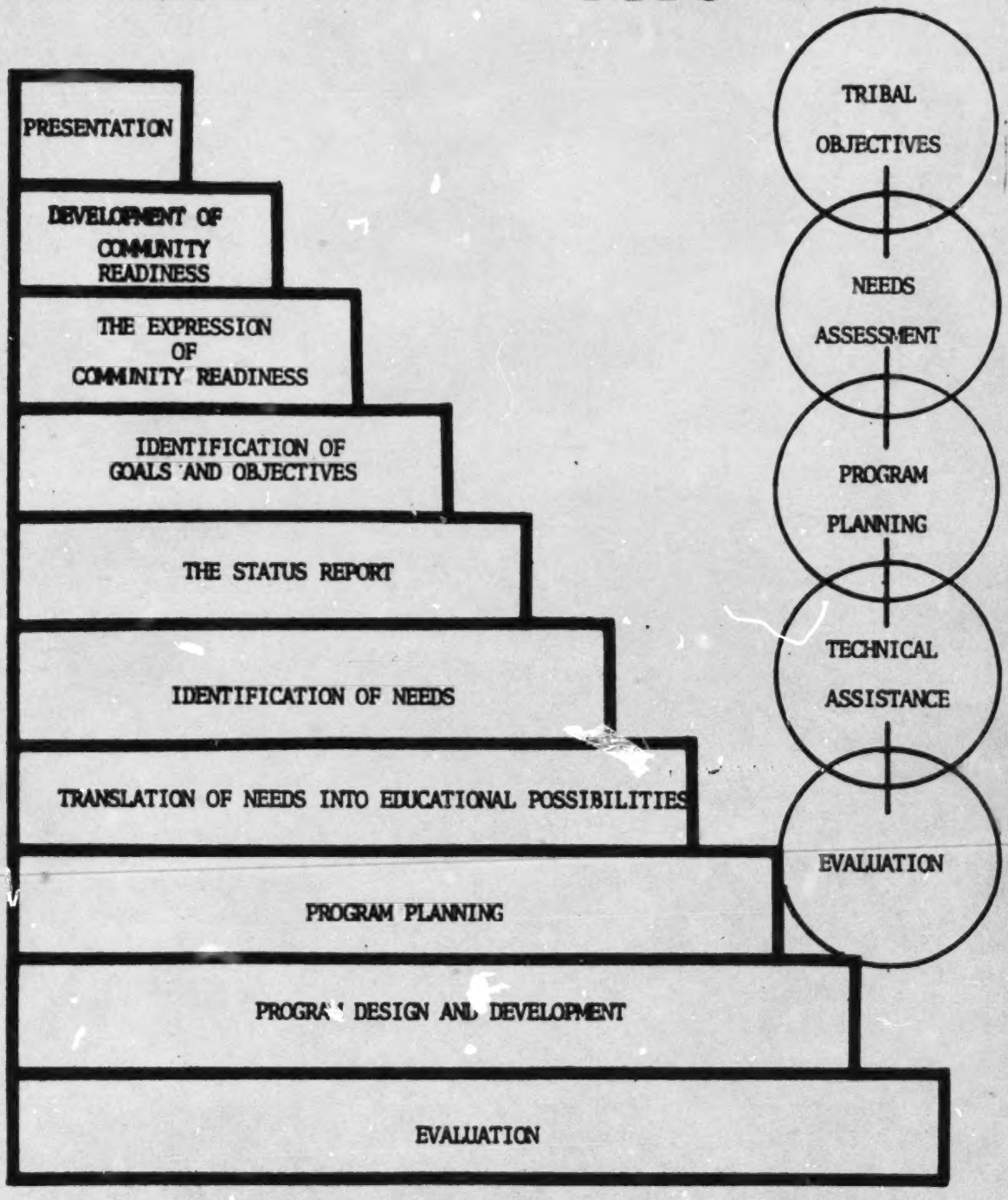
THE ANNUAL PROCESS FOR CHOICE



IN LOCAL DECISION MAKING ABOUT EDUCATIONAL CONTENT-QUALITY-CONTROL

A RECOMMENDED PROCESS

FOR THE

IMPLEMENTATION

OF

CHOICE

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been prepared in response to the Communities Have Options in Control of Education (CHOICE) Program developed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In discussing CHOICE with Indian leaders and with many interested people, including some members of Congress, it was pointed out that there was a need to know more precisely how CHOICE could be given direction.

This booklet provides recommendations as to ways the President's policy of self-determination can be implemented. Self-determination means that the BIA responds to Indian desires within the framework of national policy set by Congress and the President. It means, further, that BIA educators will listen and respond to Indian communities and their school boards.

It should be made clear, however, that the BIA, as an agency of the Federal government, has limits placed on its ability to do what either Indian people or a staff may wish. For example, the BIA must operate within the personnel regulations of the Civil Service Commission and there are many responsibilities which it cannot delegate. This does not mean that Indian people cannot make their wishes felt regarding personnel, such as the staff of a school, but it does mean that an effective Indian voice will require the highest type of cooperation between the board and the person in charge of the school.

Other limitations exist in the area of budget procedures and appropriations which are controlled by the Department of the Interior, Office of Management and Budget, and the Congress. Local school policy, on the other hand, involves much more opportunity for cooperation between the Bureau and Indian people, but it is in the actual development of programs that those who are served can have the greatest chance to make their influence count.

Indian people, then, can make Bureau programs responsive to their wishes within certain boundaries which it is essential for them to understand. The development of understandings as to the limitations placed on the BIA's services to Indian people should be given careful attention. This will not only help to develop a better working relationship between all concerned, but will also enable school boards not wishing to operate within such a framework to evaluate the advantages of other alternatives such as contract and public school.

The material in this booklet has been prepared for possible use in all schools under the jurisdiction of the BIA. The process which it sets forth should be helpful to any school wanting to look at itself to see where changes might be made. Some school boards may feel that they already have a good school and planning process, or they may want to try something different from what is suggested here. This must be their decision. What is important, though, and this is the main purpose of this booklet, is to encourage the involvement of local Indian people in critical educational decisions which affect their children. As a possible outgrowth of the processes described here, a community or tribe may decide to request a contract or other administrative change; but whether such change occurs, the process provides a valuable means for full involvement of Indian people in the education of their children.

Having pledged itself to self-determination, it becomes difficult for the BIA to set forth in detail just what it will do lest it rob Indian people of the heart of the CHOICE program, namely the principle of local involvement. With this in mind, the BIA has attempted to develop a useful process that would assist Indian people in making informed choices concerning educational programs and goals.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The following descriptions of each element in the implementation process are intended to answer four questions about putting the CHOICE program into operation. These are:

1. Who it is that performs the functions of each element in the process
2. What it is that can be accomplished in each element
3. When each part of the process should occur in the annual cycle
4. Why it is desirable that each element occur in the process

(1) PRESENTATION

The Office of Indian Education Programs will begin by explaining the CHOICE process to the Area Offices, helping them to develop appropriate, tentative guidelines for school boards and local authorities. Such guidelines should provide a useful plan to assist communities in making informed educational decisions.

(2) DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY READINESS

Under the direction of the local school board, parents and students should be informed that choices are open to the community in the conduct of their school. The school staff is expected to cooperate wherever the board requests it. Informing the community can be accomplished by using every communication means available to explain what the school board is trying to do. Tribal news media, radio and TV will be useful in many places - School Board messages through the students can call to the attention of parents the possibilities they have for expressing their opinions to the school boards. Unless the people of the community are reminded from time to time of their rights and responsibilities, the exercise of those rights and responsibilities will be doubtful. Each board should work to create community awareness of education issues and accomplishments each year. The most important time for this might be in February and March, but a program of public information for the entire year is recommended.

(3) EXPRESSION OF COMMUNITY READINESS

The school board should use every means possible in "taking the pulse" of the parents and children in the community concerning education choices. The cooperation of the school staff will prove very valuable in doing this. Distances of homes from school, the educational background of parents, the way things have always been done - these should not be allowed to become obstacles to the CHOICE program. They should only challenge the school board to find more effective ways for the people to express their opinions and choices. Questionnaires, ballots, brochures, school meetings, self-addressed envelopes and polls are a few of the means which may be used to find out what the parents and community are thinking. Though the communication channels should always be open, the critical time for the expression of community voices is usually at the beginning of the calendar year when the program review and revision cycle begins.

(4) IDENTIFICATION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The school board should insist that the school have both long and short range goals which are in keeping with those of the tribe or community. Although these goals can and will change from time to time, they are the basis on which informed choices and decisions are made. The school board should review the school goals early each year to judge whether they need to be changed to reflect current needs and wishes. The goals and objectives for the education program should be a guiding influence for the school board's decisions. Without them there is no guarantee that appropriate decisions will be made. Area, agency and local education personnel will help a school board in developing or revising goals and objectives when requested to do so. It is suggested that this review take place in April or May of each year.

(5) THE STATUS REPORT

The school board may ask for the assistance of all the school personnel in producing an annual status report of the school. This is an important step since the revised school plan for the coming school year depends on a good understanding of what happened in the past year. The report should cover 1) personnel, 2) facilities, and 3) program.

The section on personnel should list all the positions in the school, the people who are in them and what they do. It should also contain information about the students, the way the school is administered and home-school relationships within the community. The section on facilities provides an inventory of the school plant and should show both what is there and how it is being used. This would include the buildings, grounds, moveable facilities, educational materials and transportation services. The section on program should be made with the cooperation of the instructional staff to include the following areas: Instructional levels, curriculum, schedules, out-of-school activities, vocational and crafts programs activities. A special report on home living should be included for boarding schools. The success and problems for the year as compared with former years can also be reported.

The development of the status report should begin well before the school year ends in order to involve students, staff, parents and the entire community.

(6) IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS

Many of a community's needs remain the same from one year to another. However, due to changing times and to findings in research, new needs will be discovered by a school board. This element in the process gives to the school board a responsibility to find out where a community is trying to go so that it can develop a description of the needs they believe the school should help to meet.

The work of determining the needs of the students in a particular school will lead to another important task for the school board -- the arrangement of needs according to priority. This part of the process, probably more than any other, requires a school board to become educational leaders. When a school board identifies needs and arranges them into an order of importance it enters the very center of the CHOICE program, because it moves from ideas to practical judgements in the schooling of young people. Although it is suggested that this task of determining the needs of the students be an on-going activity, the priority arrangment of needs should occur as soon as the status report has been completed (June or July).

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INTRODUCTION TO STEPS SEVEN, EIGHT, NINE AND TEN IN THE CHOICE PROCESS

The next four steps will usually call for expert assistance to the school boards. This professional help must be made available to the school and is proof of the Bureau's commitment to CHOICE and its preparedness to support it. Three sources of consultation are possible here and it is suggested that they be considered by the school board in this order of preference. 1) Because they are responsible and available, technical assistance should be sought first of all from the school's own staff. Principals, teacher-supervisors, specialists and other staff in the school should be called upon to help the board in program planning and development. 2) Agency and Area staff, together with specialists from the Central Office when available, can be called upon to participate in the planning and design process. 3) Finally, consultants from nearby universities are sometimes available and are often both competent and interested in assisting Indian schools with their planning. The school board would have to budget to provide for the latter source unless the area or agency has made arrangements for assistance.

(7) TRANSLATION OF NEEDS INTO EDUCATIONAL POSSIBILITIES

While it is the responsibility of the school board to voice the community's felt needs in priority order, the board should then look to the professional education staff to translate these needs into educational programs and action. As mentioned in the introduction of these steps, every effort should be made first to involve those educators who are closest to the everyday life of the school and are responsible for carrying out the programs (the school staff, the agency, the area).

Translating the current needs of the school into educational possibilities is a necessary part of the process for two main reasons. (1) It is here that the school board will discover if and how the school can meet the needs which have been decided upon. (2) It is here, also, that the teachers of Indian children begin to fill their proper role, without taking over the responsibilities which belong to the parents, community, and its elected officials. This work should involve an examination of how educational programs can be made to meet the needs which the community has identified. It would take place whenever the required technical assistance is most available.

(8) PROGRAM PLANNING AND REVISION

Once the school board is sure that their needs can be met by education in the local school, they can plan the desired program revisions for the coming school year. This planning should include what is needed for carrying on the program such as staff, materials, space, etc. Through this planning and revision activity, the school board will have entered into the budget process for their school. It is at this point, also, that decisions regarding the management options should be made.

(9) PROGRAM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

At this point the plans must be made in such a way that the school staff can understand exactly how the program will operate. The school board should expect this task to be performed by the school staff with whatever technical assistance they may need. Where revisions have been planned, the instructional program should be designed with the persons who will be expected to carry out the plan. Plans should be ready far enough in advance of the beginning of the program to give staff enough time to prepare. Some new programs will have had to be planned long before the summer months in order to fit into the proposal and budget cycles of their funding sources. Once the planning is completed, the school board should see to it that the community understands what the school will be trying to do. This will be one of the ways in which the school board can show that it is being responsible to the people who chose them to serve.

(10) EVALUATION

As a final element in the CHOICE process a school and its board will need to know how well the planned programs are working out. Evaluation is something which is most helpful when it is carefully planned. The planning should include the following: 1) evaluation is part of the original program plan; 2) it is designed carefully by those who are trained in evaluation techniques; 3) everyone with an interest in the program has a chance to say how they feel about the program - students, parents, community, and school staff; 4) the evaluation should measure what the program <u>did accomplish</u> in comparison with what it <u>tried to accomplish</u>; 5) the evaluation is carried on while the program is in operation, and 6) the results of the evaluation are used to help plan changes in the program.

A FINAL WORD

Indian people, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the nation as a whole all have a common interest in assuring a quality education for Indian children. No education program can be truly effective, however, unless it has the support and develops with the involvement of those who most directly benefit from it - in this case the Indian students, parents and communities. The initial CHOICE document is an attempt to explain the procedure which the Bureau of Indian Affairs will follow to insure that educational self-determination becomes a fact for Indian people. This document has tried to offer some helpful suggestions to school boards and Bureau educators on how they might go about putting the CHOICE program into action. To those who work with the process suggested here we invite your comments and suggestions on it. The efforts of all of us, working together, are needed to make the schools serve their intended purpose.